SOUS LE HAUT PATRONAGE
DE S.M.I. LE SHAHINSHAH ARYAMEHR

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SOUS LE HAUT PATRONAGE DE S. M. I. LA SHAHBANOU FARAH PAHLAVI

Le 2e Congrès International d'Études mithriaques s'est tenu à Téhéran, du 1er au 8 septembre 1975.
Le président d'honneur était S. E. Shodjaeddin Shafa, Vice-Ministre de la Cour Impériale, Directeur de la Bibliothèque Pahlavi.
Le comité organisateur était composé de Sir Harold Bailey, Président, et de MM. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, D. Francis, R. Frye, R. Gordon et J. Hinnells.

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D. Francis a révisé les textes en anglais. La communication de S. Insler paraîtra dans les Mélanges Vermaseren.

JOHN ANDREW BOYLE

RAVEN'S ROCK: A MITHRAIC *SPELAEUM* IN ARMENIAN FOLKLORE?

That Mithra (*Mihr*) was worshipped in pre-Christian Armenia is a well attested fact. The pagan Armenians had adopted the Iranian pantheon *en bloc*, and a temple consecrated to Mihr at Bagayarič in Upper Armenia (the present-day Pekeriç in the Turkish province of Erzurum) was destroyed by Tiridates III and Gregory the Illuminator *ca.* A.C. 300[1]. That some memory of the heathen deity may have survived amongst the Armenians into modern times seems first to have been suggested by Mardiros H. Ananikian. In the section on Mihr in his *Armenian Mythology*[2] he writes:[3]

> We find in the region of Sassun (ancient Tarauntis) a legendary hero, called Meher, who gathers around himself a good many folk-tales and becomes involved even in eschatological legends. He still lives with his horse as a captive in a cave called Zymp-zymps[4] which can be entered in the Ascension night. There he turns the wheel of fortune, and thence he will appear at the end of the world.

Ananikian is referring here to an episode in the folk epic known as *David of Sasun* or the *Daredevils of Sasun*. During the *XI International Congress of Orientalists* held at Paris in 1948 the Armenian folklorist M. Dikran-Tchitouny gave a summary of his version of the epic, based on four variants which he had collected in the region of Van-Sparkert[5]. In that summary the story of Mher the Younger is related in the following terms:[6]

[1] See René Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071* (Paris 1947), pp. 117-120 and 123.

[2] Boston, 1925.

[3] p. 34.

[4] Perhaps a corruption of the *čənəvəzi* "cuneiform" of Dikran-Tchitouny's text. See below, p. 69, note 27.

[5] See *Actes du XI^e Congrès International des Orientalistes, Paris-23-31 juillet 1948* (Paris 1949), pp. 368-371.

[6] *Ibid.* p. 371.

> Mehér le Cadet est né *archi-géant*. Il se venge de tous les ennemis de son illustre père. Mais, ayant lutté avec son père, sans le connaître, et, de ce fait, étant maudit par lui, accusé injustement par la jeune femme de son oncle, aux avances amoureuses de laquelle il avait refusé de céder, Mehér ne trouve pas d'autre salut que d'aller sur les tombeaux de son père et de sa mère, pour demander pardon et conseil. Ses parents ressuscités lui indiquent le chemin de Van, où se trouve le *Roc-Taillé*. Mehér y va et pénètre dans le rocher, avec son poulain Kourckic-Djalaline, attiré par un *Corbeau-Noir*. Le Roc se referme, emprisonnant Mehér, à cheval, dans l'enceinte du granit.
>
> Chaque année, la nuit *miraculeuse de l'Ascension, les portes du ciel s'ouvrent ; la manne tombe sur la Terre ; Mehér sort, ramasse une partie de la manne, rentre dans le Roc, qui se referme de nouveau. Mehér mange de cette manne, qui lui suffira pour toute l'année.*
>
> *Mehér est toujours là, â l'intérieur du Roc-Taille de Van-Tospe. Deux cierges brûlent*, nuit et jour, à ses deux côtés. *La Roue-de-l'Univers* (Tchahri Felég) est devant ses yeux. Lorsque cette Roue cessera de tourner, Mehér, monté sur son poulain, sortira de son tombeau de granit, et alors ce sera la fin du monde ancien et le début du règne de Mehér, c'est-à-dire du *Règne de la Justice* pour tous...[7]).

The session at which Dikran-Tchitouny read his paper was presided over by Professor Geo Widengren, who alludes to it in two of his works, *Iranisch-semitische Kulturbegegnung in parthischer Zeit*[8] and *Die Religionen Irans*[9], in both of which he positively identifies Mher with the Iranian deity. No further notice seems to have been taken of Dikran-Tchitouny's paper until the meeting of the *First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, where it was discussed on both formal and informal occasions and where the feeling was expressed that the story of Mher's confinement in the Carved Rock might well hold the key to some basic problems of Western Mithraism[10].

[7] Tchitouny's text, speaks in fact only of Mher's ravaging the world. See below, pp. 69 and note 28.

[8] Cologne, 1960, p. 65.

[9] Stuttgart, 1965, pp. 209 and 239.

[10] See *Mithraic Studies*, pp. 84-89 and 356-357.

In view of the interest then aroused I read through the whole episode as recounted in Tchitouny's text[11], which I discovered to be considerably more detailed than the corresponding passages in the Soviet standardized version[12]. I have prepared a *résumé* of the text and have added some remarks by way of commentary. I hope that this information may be of assistance to Mithraists in deciding whether or not the Armenian material can throw any light upon their researches.

The exiled Mher, arriving at his father's tomb, falls asleep and dreams a dream, in which voices say to him:

> "...Mher, Mher, O Mher,
> Thy father David has cursed thee;
> Thou shalt not see death and
> thou shalt have no heir.
> Go till thou come to Raven's Rock[13]
> enter it;
> Thou shalt remain there until the
> Last Judgement."

Waking he throws himself on the grave and addresses his father:

> "Father, rise up, father, rise up;
> rise up from thy sweet sleep.
> To-day they have turned me out
> of the House of Sasun.
> They have closed their courts to me...
> To-day freezing snow has come.
> Thy child Mher's feet are frozen...
> To-day they have deprived me
> of the House of Sasun.

[11] *Sassounacan, épopée populaire arménienne* (Paris 1942), pp. 1083-1097.

[12] I have consulted Frédéric Feydit's translation, *David de Sassoun*, Paris 1964, and also the composite translation by Leon Surmelian, *The Daredevils of Sassouns*, London 1966.

[13] Tchitouny's text has here and elsewhere *Akrap'u-K'ar*, On p. 1090, note 3, he mentions also a form *Akərp'u-K'ar*, i.e. "Rock of Akirp'i", Akərp'i being the name of a village. I have preferred *Agṙawu-K'ar* "Raven's Rock" which Tchitouny regards as a corruption due to the intervention of the raven in the story. Feydit and Surmelian both have "Raven's Rock" in the corresponding passages.

Come out, give me Məsər[14] that I
may go and dwell there.
I am left an orphan wandering
forsaken from door to door."

His father's voice answers him from the tomb:

"My son, what can I do? My son,
what can I do?
The strength has gone from my hand,
the hair has fallen from my beard.
The colour has fled from my face,
the light is cut off from my eyes.
Snakes and scorpions have made their nests in me.
My son, Məsər belongs to the Melik
of Məsər[15].
Go to Raven's Rock, go to Raven's Rock!
Thy bread is baked, thy food is
cooked.
The day thou wast born, my son,
Raven['s Rock] was written on thy
head[16].
Go to Raven's Rock, on Tospan Hill.
Go, immortal Cain, my side still
pains me[17].
I have cursed thee; there shall
be no death for thee on earth.
Go, enter the Carved Rock, on the
Plain of Van."

[14] I.e. Miṣr (Egypt). See the following note.

[15] There are two bearers of this title in the epic, the first being the opponent and then the ally of Mher the Elder and the second a son of Mher by the Melik's widow and so the half-brother of David of Sasun. See Chaké Der Melkonian-Minassian, *L'Epopée populaire arménienne David de Sassoun* (Montreal 1972), pp. 46-49, and 158-159 and 99-105. Melkonian-Minassian, p. 108, sees in the Melik of Məsər an incarnation of all the invaders of Armenia, but the title exactly fits the Aiyūbids, the dynasty of Saladin, who had expanded eastwards into the Lake Van area, and there is certainly some reminiscence of their successors the Mamelukes, who put an end to the kingdom of Little Armenia.

[16] I.e. thou wast fated to go there.

[17] On Mher's battle with his father, who then lays a curse upon him, see Melkonian-Minassian, p. 62.

But Mher has no mind to enter the Carved Rock, and, his father making no further reply to his pleas, he turns to his mother's tomb.

"Rise up, mother, rise up, rise up out
of thy sweet sleep
It is I, the son that drank the milk
of thy breast
For seven months thou didst nurse me
above thy tender heart.
I have been round the world many
times and have seen many men.
I have not seen so sweet a mother
as thee in this world.
Come out, give me Tehran [18], I shall
come into my possession.
To-day they have deprived me of the
House of Sasun;
I am wandering from door to door, I am left
an orphan.
Tell me, mother, tell me, what shall
I do?"

His mother replies:

"My son, what can I do? My son,
what can I do?
The hair has fallen from my head,
the colour has fled from my face.
The light is cut off from my eyes, the
grace has flown from my hand.
Snakes and scorpions make their
nests in me.
My son, Tehran belongs to the Shah
of Persia [19].
Raven's Rock is written on thy head.
Go to Raven's Rock, go to Raven's
Rock.

[18] This is of course, a flagrant anachronism. Tehran, an insignificant place in the Middle Ages, became the capital of Persia only at the end of the 18th century.

[19] See the previous note.

Thy place is destroyed, thy clothes
torn.
Thou hast wandered enough in
the world.
So long as thy horse does not sink
in the dry ground,
Thou art free to wander in the
world.
When thy horse sinks in the dry
ground
thou shalt stay in the Carved Rock.
For thee there is no entrance into
the ground. Go to the Rock of Van on
Tospan Hill."

Mher speaks again to his mother and she gives him the same message; and finally, mounted on his horse, the Colt Jalali[20], he sets out from Sasun to seek the Carved Rock. A prince lies in wait for him in the Ostan Pass and lassoos Mher's mount, but with a blow of his sword he frees the animal and rides on. In his despair he appeals now to God Himself:

"'O God', he said, 'either give battle to Mher or
raise up his soul of this world and take it
to Thee'.
God sent seven angels on horseback;
they dismounted to do battle with Mher.
They fought from noon till evening,
all of the day.
However much Mher wielded the
Flashing Sword[21],
He could not touch the angels.
As for the angels they shot many
[arrows], they tormented Mher.
He was at his wit's end. He raised
his eyes to Heaven and prayed:

[20] On the Colt Jalali, the supernatural mount of all the four heroes of the epic in succession, see Melkonian-Minassian, pp. 160-161.

[21] On this hereditary weapon of the heroes of the epic see Melkonian-Minassian, pp. 184-185.

'O Lord God, my father's curse
has struck me.
The vein in my loins has been
wrenched out and flung away.
I have had no heir in this world.
Nor will death come for me,
until the Last Judgement.
I beseech Thee, Lord God
In Thy Mercy open the Door
for Mher,
Do thus, let him into the Rock
of Van,
That his soul may be occupied
until the Last Judgement."
He turned his eyes towards the earth;
He saw that his horse had entered
Tospan Plain.....
He looked across the plain —
what did he see? A raven was
croaking there.
He shot an arrow at the raven
and hit and wounded it.
The raven flew off; Mher
urged on his horse in pursuit of
it.
He came to a great rock that
was called the Carved Rock
The rock opened like a cave. He
looked, the raven had gone inside.
Mher turned his horse back on
the ground.
When he turned, the horse's feet did
not remain on the surface of the ground,
They sank to the knees in the ground...

Finally Mher drags his horse back to the rock and stands weeping in front of it.

"By God's command the rock
opened and Mher entered upon his horse...
When he had entered he got off his horse
and tethered it.

The door closed and he with his
horse was left inside."
A voice came from above the rock
and said:
"Mher", it said, "thou with thy
horse shalt remain in the rock
until the barleycorn grows to the
size of the hip.
And the earth becomes firm and
solid and supports the feet of thy
horse.
When that day comes
Mher and his horse will again
come out of the rock.
Mher will traverse the world
from end to end.
He will wreak havoc[22] and
will die."

Once a year at midnight on the Feast of Ascension the rock miraculously opens and Mher comes out on his horse, but the earth is too soft to support its weight, and he re-enters the rock, and the door closes behind him. Two hours he spends outside the rock and during that time manna falls from heaven, and Mher and his horse eat their fill of it and are not hungry again for a whole year.

Whoever remains awake that night
and sees all this,
whatever his heart desires is
miraculously granted.
Mher's Door is open in front; who-
ever boldly enters takes as much gold as he wishes and comes out.
Here there is boundless gold and silver piled up.
How many people have made the
attempt and have gone in!
They have been greedy and have
said "Let us carry off a lot!"

[22] See below p. 69, note 28.

and they have been too late.
The door has closed upon them
and they have been left in the cave[23].
To this day Mher and his horse
are still hale and hearty.
(We have not seen this, we have
heard it from others).
Night and day one candle burns
on either side.
To this day Mher sits there
astride his horse
He is a giant whose chest
is seven cubits in breath.
The hair of his body, they say,
grows out and covers the [whole]
body.
As for his horse, there is always
lucerne laid in front of it;
Summer and winter it is always
green here.....

One "Red Sunday," that is the third Sunday after Easter, a man told his daughter to take a candle to church and light it from the Holy Light upon the Altar. Seeing the smoke of a candle coming from the Carved Rock she thought the place where the candle was burning must be a church. She went inside, and the door closed behind her. She saw manna falling from the sky. Mher and his horse ate it; the girl did too; and they were filled. A whole year passed before they were hungry again. Then the door opened, and the girl took her lighted candle and returned home[24].

Her father asked: "Daughter,
a whole year has passed:
Where hast thou been?"
The girl replied: "How [dost thou mean]?
Did I not go just now?

[23] See below p. 69, note 28.

[24] On the motif of intruders' being allowed to remove treasure from the Sleeping Hero's cave, see below p. 69, note 28.

I lit a candle, I did not stay;
I came back [at once]."[25]
"Who was in this house where
thou wast?" said her father.
"There was a large man and his
horse."
"What didst thou see at the door?"
"There was a tall walnut
tree; there was nothing else."
"Ah! What didst thou eat there?"
"Something round," she said, "like
consecrated bread came from the Sky.
I ate of it, the man too and
his horse also.
and afterwards we felt no hunger."

On another occasion, one Ascension night, a shepherd noticed the door of the cave was open. He entered and beheld a gigantic man and his horse. Mher picked up the shepherd and held him in the palm of his hand, marvelling at his minute size. He questioned him about the world outside and was told about the invention of fire arms that killed from a distance. He asked how big men were now. Were they like Gog and Magog or a little smaller? No, said the shepherd, they were the same size as he. Then Mher understood that the world had not changed. He put the man down and bade him go. The shepherd realized that it was Mher.

He asked: "Mher, when wilt thou come
out of thy cave?"
"When a grain of wheat is as large as
a hip
and a barleycorn is as big as a
plum."
By God's will the Rock opened
again.
The shepherd came out. He went
into the world and told [his
tale].

[25] On the supernatural lapse of time see below p. 69, note 28.

The poem ends with Mher contemplating the Čaxri Felek, which, whatever it means here, is a corruption of the Persian expression *čarx-i falak* (which has also passed into the Turkish language)[26], literally "the celestial sphere" and metaphorically "fate" or "destiny":

> Mher is there, inside the cave in
> the Van Rock.
> It is also called Mher's Door.
> Cuneiform[27] writing is engraved deep
> on the door of the rock.
> The Čaxri-Felek is turning inside
> this rock.
> It is a sign of the Sun which
> soars and turns day and night,
> Which, like a fiery horse, flies up
> and up.
> This is the soaring wheel of the
> terrestrial globe,
> and Mer is always watching it.
> When this wheel stops one day and
> turns no more,
> Mher's Door will open.
> That day Mher will be freed and
> will come out
> and will ravage the world.
> But when shall we see this? When
> the world comes to an end.

Leaving aside for the present the question of Mher's identity with his namesake the Iranian deity, we shall have no difficulty in recognising in his story a variant of the widespread folklore theme of the king or hero, asleep in a mountain cave, who at the appointed time will emerge from his hiding place to save his nation or the world[28].

[26] Spelt in the Latin alphabet *çarkifelek*.

[27] *čəməvəzi*, perhaps a corruption of some Turco-Arabic word. In fact there *is* cuneiform writing on the rock. See below p. 73, and note 47.

[28] See E.S. Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales* (London 1891), pp. 205-221; Sir John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx* (Oxford 1901), II, 456-497; A. van Gennep, *La Formation des légendes* (Paris 1920), pp. 193-200; A.H. Krappe, *The Science of Folk-lore* (London 1930), pp. 108-110; *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* ed. E. Hoffman-Krayer *et al.*, s.v. *Bergentrückt*. In the case of Mher and Artavazdes (see below p. 71 and note 33) there is of course some contamination

In the West the legend has been attached to many legendary and historical personages, of whom the best known examples are Arthur of Britain—*rex quondam rexque futurus*—and the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. We have perhaps a much older version of the legend in the report by Plutarch's friend Demetrius who had been sent by the Roman Emperor to explore the coasts of Britain. On one of the offshore islands Demetrius was told by the inhabitants of another island in which Cronus was imprisoned, with Briareus keeping guard over him as he slept, while around him were many deities, who waited on him as his henchmen and attendants[29]. In the East, in Persia, we have instances of such sleeping saviours in the Zoroastrian Kərəsāspa and in the last Imām of the Shī'ites, the Mahdī[30]. It is, however, in Armenia itself that we find the closest parallel to Mher. We are told in the *History* of Moses of Khoren how Artavazdes, the son of Artaxia II, who reigned *ca.* 34 B.C.E., is cursed by his dead father in the following terms:

> If thou ridest in the chase
> up upon noble Masis[31],
> May the genii (*k'ajk'*) seize
> thee and take thee
> Up upon noble Masis,
> that thou mayst remain
> There and no more see the light.

And Moses adds:

> Old women relate of him that he is imprisoned in a cave, bound with iron chains; and two dogs are constantly gnawing

with "the fire-god, master-smith and demiourgos *par excellence*, Prometheus and Hephaistos in Greece, Lug in Ireland, Loki in Iceland, not forgetting, of course, his rôle in the Christian mythology of the Orient and the European MiddleAges." See Krappe 1930, pp. 333-334. On intruders' being allowed to help themselves to gold and silver (p. 67 and note 24) see Hartland, pp. 207-209, Rhys, II, 494-495. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, l.c. section 6; on the supernatural lapse of time during their stay underground (p. 68 and note 25) Hartland, pp. 161 ff, *Handwörterbuch*, l.c. section 7.

[29] *De defectu oraculorum*, xviii. See Robert Flagelière (ed. and transl), *Sur la Disparition des oracles* (Paris, 1947), pp. 146-148. The passage was first quoted and discussed by Rhys, II, 493-494; see also also R.S. Loomis, "Arthurian Tradition and Folklore", *Folklore*, LXIX, 1-25 (esp. 13-14).

[30] See Arthur Christensen, *Les Kayanides* (Copenhagen 1931), pp. 102-103.

[31] I.e. Ararat.

> at the chains and he is trying to escape and put an end to the world. But the chains, they say, are strengthened by the sound of blacksmiths' hammering. Therefore, it is that, even in our days, many blacksmiths, complying with the legend, strike their anvils three or four times on a Sunday in order, they say, that his chains may be strenghtened[32].

Eznik of Kołb[33] records a different version of the legend in accordance with which the genii of the mountain are holding Artavazdes prisoner in order to prevent him from succouring his people; he will, however, finally free himself and save his country and nation. It is on this legend, in the opinion of Melkonian-Minassian, that the story of Mher the Younger is largely based. She provides a comparative table of the correspondences between the legend and the epic, of which the most striking is the paternal curse laid upon both Mher and Artavazdes[34].

An extremely interesting element in the story of Mher is the intervention of the raven that guides him to the rock. The raven in the rôle of scout or guide is a familiar feature in folklore and mythology. Leaving aside the bird which Noah sent out from the Ark and "which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth"[35], we may mention Odin's Hugin and Muninn, which "fly over the world each day," and the three ravens of Bügü Khan, the legendary king of the Uighur, "that knew all tongues; and whenever he had a matter on hand thither the ravens would go and act as spies and bring back news."[36] Of the raven in the rôle of guide we may quote from the examples in Classical literature the story of the birds that led the army of Alexander the Great to an oasis in the Libyan desert[37]. In the West at least the raven seems to have been associated with the Sleeping Hero. Barbarossa, disturbed in his slumbers, asks the intruder whether the ravens are still flying

[32] ii.61. See also Melkonian-Minassian, p. 114.

[33] Quoted by Melkonian-Minassian, p. 115. Here there is quite clearly a conflation of the Sleeping Hero and the Chained Satan.

[34] P. 116.

[35] Genesis, viii. 7.

[36] Juvaini, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, transl. J.A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958), I, 57.

[37] For further examples see A.H. Krappe, "Arturus Cosmocrator", *Speculum*, XX (1945), 405-414 (409); E.A. Armstrong, *The Folklore of Birds* (London 1958), pp. 78-79.

round the Kyffhäuser[38]. As for Arthur, it was believed in Cornwall, and perhaps at one time in other parts of Great Britain, that he had been changed by enchantment into a raven and would retain that shape throughout the ages until he finally returned to recover his throne and kingdom[39]. The closest parallel to Mher's raven is, however, as Dr. Gershevitch has suggested[40], the bird *karšiptar*, which, according to the *Vendidad*, took the Mazdayasnian religion to Yima's Var, the suggestion being the more attractive because of Gershevitch's identification of *karšiptar* as the actual Avestan word for "raven"[41]. According to the *Bundahišn* the *karšiptar* was said to possess the gift of speech and in at least one version of the Armenian epic Mher's guide is described as "a talking raven of fiery colour[43]" The *karšiptar* is perhaps also reflected in the "black crow"[44] in the Modern Persian variant[45] of the international tale known as the Three Magical Objects, most familiar in the West as the Grimm brothers' "Tischchen deck dich, Goldesel und Knüppel aus dem Sack"[46]. The bird bestows the objects on a peasant called, by a curious

[38] Hartland, p. 214, Loomis, p. 13.

[39] See Krappe 1945, p. 405, Loomis, p. 16. The legend had reached 16th-century Spain — it would be interesting to know from what source. "A Spanish chronicle printed in 1582 asserted that in England it was common talk... that Arthur had been enchanted into the form of a crow and that many penalties were inflicted on anyone who killed one of the birds. The chronicle added the astounding and surely erroneous report that Philip II of Spain had sworn... that he would resign his title to the crown of England if Arthur should come back". See Loomis, l.c. Cervantes refers on three occasions to this legend; the first reference (*Don Quijote*, Part I, Chapter 13) is worth quoting in full: "No han vuestras mercedes leído, respondió D. Quijote, los anales e historias de Ingalaterra donde se tratan las famosas fazañas del rey Arturo, que comunmente en nuestro romance castellano llamamos el rey Artús, de quien es tradición antigua y común en todo aquel reino de la Gran Bretaña, que este rey no murió, si no que por arte de encantamento se convirtió en cuervo, y que andando los tiempos ha de volver a reinar y a cobrar su reino y cetro; a cuya causa no se probará que desde aquel tiempo a este haya ningún inglés muerto cuervo alguno?"

[40] *Mithraic Studies*, I, 88.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Arthur Christensen, *Les Types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'historie légendaire des Iraniens*, Part II (Leiden, 1934), 21.

[43] Surmelian, p. 247.

[44] *kalāγ-i siyāh*. Perhaps the raven is meant. It cannot be the carrion crow, which is not found in Persia, and in fact in the illustrations to Ṣubḥī's book the bird is shown as a Royston or hooded crow.

[45] See Ṣubḥī, *Afsānahā-yi Kuhan* (Tehran, 1328/1949-50), pp. 75-84.

[46] No. 36 in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. On the wide distribution of this tale see van Gennep, pp. 4, 5-47.

coincidence, Mihrak ("Little Mihr") in a cave to which Mihrak finds his way by following a feather given him by the bird as it floats along on the wind.

Whether the *karšiptar* or Mher's raven bear any relation to the bird depicted in Western Mithraea is a question on which, as a non-specialist, I should not like to venture an opinion. There is, however, nothing necessarily Mithraic about the Carved Rock. Known also as Mher's Door it is a megalithic block on the mountains east of Van covered with cuneiform inscriptions of the Urartian period;[47] there is a photograph of it in Melkonian-Minnassian's book[48]. As for the description of Mher seated on horseback in his cave it is undeniably reminiscent of a Mithraic relief. The candles burning on either side of him have been aptly compared with the torchbearers Cautes and Cautopates. And the Čaxri Felek, of which the precise function and significance escape me, might well be thought to represent the framework of the tableau, viz., the signs of the zodiac. Yet I have an uneasy feeling that all these resemblances are purely fortuitous and that the story of Mher the Younger has nothing to do with either Eastern Mithra or Western Mithras, but is simply one of the endless variants of the old Indo-European theme of the Sleeping Hero.

[47] Melkonian-Minassian, p. 116, note 72.

[48] Facing p. 116.